



"SANDBAG"

WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER



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NEWS FROM THE BRANCHOctober
2020Editor Tony Goddard
01963-824193**Remembrance Sunday 8th November**Branch secretary Steve
Lee 01963-34374**Remembrance 2020 and the Covid 19 pandemic**

Government regulations are changing all the time but it is safe to say that varying degrees of restrictions will be in place in November. As it stands now churches are restricted in numbers of people attending and no hymns may be sung. Social gatherings are also restricted both indoors and outside so we must comply with the situations as we now know it. Along with complying with the responsibilities of government rules we must also fulfil our moral obligations of Remembrance.

There will be **NO PARADES** this year but there are three areas we need to fulfil, (1) Wreath laying and following tradition within the church around the Roll of Honour inside. (2) Placing of wreaths at the War Memorial within grounds of Memorial Hall. (3) As 11th November follows Remembrance Sunday this year we also need to observe the 11th hour of the 11th day and at the "Old Faithful" Memorial.

Wreath laying within church *will* take place by a small group restricted in numbers to those dictated by the government, therefore *wreath laying in church* will commence at 0930 hrs on Remembrance Sunday (8th November) by a selected invited group ONLY representing the wreaths being laid in church as per a list of wreath layers (and this cannot exceed 14 persons). The names of the Fallen of both World Wars and the crew of "Old Faithful" will be read in church and Last Post & Reveille played appropriately as is tradition. This all could last approximately 30-40 minutes after which the group will move to the War Memorial at Memorial Hall informally and re-assemble at the Memorial Hall around 1045 hrs. No other members of the public will be allowed in church by government order.

As with VJ Day the actual ceremony will be solely undertaken by invited participants and in the closed off grounds of the Memorial commencing around 1055 hrs on 8th November. The placing of crosses by youth groups will not take place this year because of government restrictions and especially involving very young children. In the public areas of road and paths opposite the Memorial Hall Covid 19 signs regarding correct social distancing will be placed and monitored. We are not allowed under current regulations to sing hymns so the ceremony will be in the form of prayers and Last Post and Reveille (as with VJ Day). A list of invitees will be distributed as soon as possible which will include one representative of civic and youth groups in line with permitted legal numbers pertaining at the time.

We wish to observe the 11th hour of 11th month on 11th November, as wreaths will already have been placed on the previous Sunday this could take the form of prayers and Exhortation with Last Post and Reveille. Although a trumpeter will be sought we do have the RBL recorded disc which can be used. As is tradition we would like to visit the "Old Faithful" memorial at Bayford after observing the 11th hour. Normally we informally travel to Bayford say prayers and lay fresh wreaths at the Memorial, if we do have a trumpeter the norm is that the trumpeter plays Last Post & Reveille there too.

The street and car park in front of the Memorial Hall is a public place so we do not have the power to ban people from being there. We are able to restrict people both in church and in the private grounds of the Memorial Hall. Please bear with us in this difficult time, if you do wish to be on public roads etc., please be very careful to observe the Covid 19 regulations current at the time. and mindful of government powers.

Tony



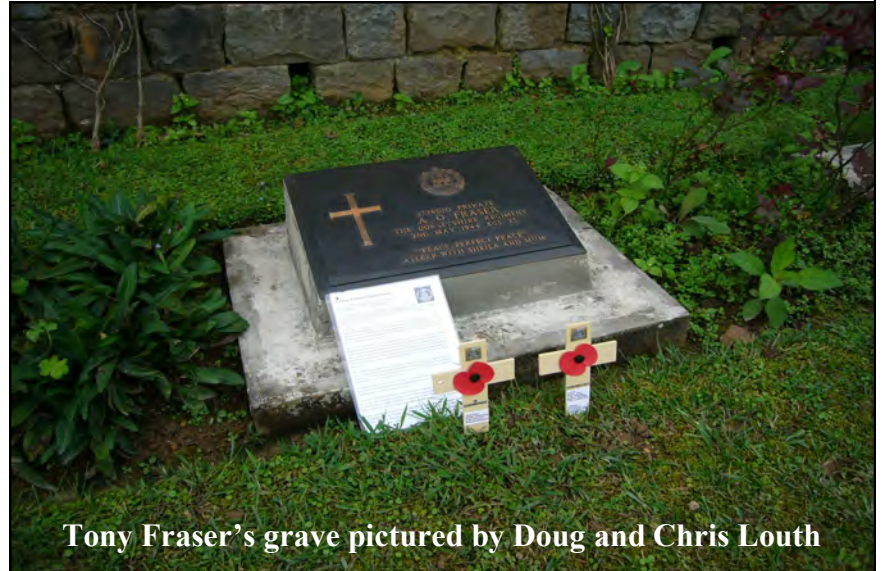
Passing of a good friend and staunch Legion member

We were very sad to hear that Sid Bundy passed away this month. Sid was the branch Standard Bearer for over 25 years and was the holder of our branch Certificate of Appreciation of Service. Sid served his National Service and joined our branch immediately afterwards. He was always smartly turned out and in fact when Dave Hill heard of Sid's passing he said " Sid was always there when you needed him and could always march in step, better than many could manage !" The above photo was taken on Remembrance Sunday 2008 and bears out Dave's statement. Sid was recommended by the branch to parade our standard at the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall London an honour he was most proud of and would mention fondly. He will be truly missed as not only a good and trustworthy friend but a "gentleman". Our sincere condolences go to Maria and the family. *Tony*

VJ Day 75th Anniversary

It was year ago at the 75th anniversary of "Old Faithful that the Mayor approached Rob & I to ask if the branch would host a special commemoration for the anniversary of VJ Day (Victory over Japan) which finally ended the Second World War. As we were both mindful of this anniversary on 15th August this year, our response was immediate and very positive. Who would have known that a pandemic of the magnitude we are now experiencing would cause havoc with our plans and who too would have forecast the weather on the day. However it did not prevent us from expressing our respect for those who took part and made the ultimate sacrifice. In my thoughts was Tony Fraser from West Hill who prior to the Second World War was a Territorial Army soldier in Gillingham. He worked at the Cow and Gate factory as a packer and in fact was at work when word came to him that he was called up. He was posted to B Company 2nd Bn. Dorset Regt.

and was with them at The Battle of Kohima as part of the British 2nd Division which were forced to withdraw over 1000 miles to the very borders of India where they were involved at the battles of Imphal and Kohima which helped turn the tide of the war in the Far East. During an epic battle in the jungle-clad hills of Assam the Japanese were fought to a standstill. From 18 April 1944 to 13 May British and Indian reinforcements counter-attacked to drive the Japanese from the positions they had captured. The Japanese abandoned the ridge at this point but continued to block the Kohima–Imphal road. From 16 May to 22 June the British and Indian troops pursued the retreating Japanese and reopened the road. The battle ended on 22 June when British and Indian troops from Kohima and Imphal met at Milestone 109, ending the Siege of Imphal. On 2nd May A Company 2nd Dorset were right at the front of the fighting, under very heavy fire for four days without food or supplies and taking very heavy casualties. On the evening of the 1st May A Company were shelled by a Japanese 75 mm gun and many killed including the Company Sgt. Major. The commander requested permission to withdraw but was told to hold his ground until first light next day. At 1040 hrs on 2nd May B Company moved up and relieved “A” under strong British artillery and mortar fire. The Japanese gun which had inflicted such heavy losses on A Company was still taking its toll and after firing six rounds hit Company HQ of B Company, seven of the Dorsets were killed and eight wounded. Amongst the dead was Tony Fraser, he was aged 23 years. Tony’s sister Sheila is also remembered on our Roll of Honour in church too as she was killed during enemy bombing of the Vickers Armstrong factory in Weybridge on 6th September 1940.



Tony Fraser’s grave pictured by Doug and Chris Louth

In September 2006 Doug and Chris Louth visited Kohima and agreed to place a cross there for Tony and Sheila (whose name is remembered on Tony’s grave stone at the request of his father). They also took a laminated copy of Tony’s story from his home town. Over the years of giving “the Kohima Blessing” Tony and Sheila’s names do come to my mind.

“When you go home, tell them of us, and say, for your tomorrow they gave our today”

We also remember Petty Officer Hedley Martin RN who died fighting the Japanese, he lived at “The Firs” on Bayford Hill and went to Wincanton Council School (the Primary School now) and Sexey’s School in Bruton. Hedley left school at 15 years old and entered the boys service of the Royal Navy at HMS Ganges as Boy 2nd Class. Hedley’s first ship after training was HMS Royal Sovereign and later another battleship, the ill fated HMS Royal Oak. His subsequent posting was to the Destroyer HMS Escapade before transferring to the Fleet Air Arm, after which he joined the RN Submarine Service. Hedley was killed on board the mine laying submarine HMS Porpoise which was sunk off Penang, Malaya and was the last British submarine to have been sunk by the Japanese. HMS Porpoise was part of the 4th Submarine Flotilla based in Trincomalee Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Having just arrived there in July 1944 from an extensive refit in Portsmouth, HMS Porpoise was on her first mission minelaying mission off the coast of Malaya when on 6th July reported sinking a Japanese vessel by gunfire in the Strait of Malacca and then over the next few days laid mines. Mines from HMS Porpoise subsequently sank two Japanese submarine chasers off Sumatra and on 9th/10th September 1944 her mines also sank two Japanese tankers. On 2nd January 1945 HMS Porpoise sailed from Trincomalee intending to lay mines at the southern end of the Japanese occupied island of Penang, Malaya. A signal was received that her mission was successfully carried out and this was the last heard of HMS Porpoise. Japanese records show that an enemy submarine was spotted off Penang and bombed by aircraft, assumptions were made that it was HMS Porpoise that sank on 16th January 1945 taking all her crew. Hedley Martin has no known grave and is commemorated on the Plymouth Naval Memorial on the Hoe.



For us too we have Pat (Maddie) Bowler who as a child was captured by the Japanese in China and spent three years of captivity in a Japanese internment camp. Pat's father was an officer in the Merchant Navy operating out of Shanghai. Pat laid a wreath for all those who suffered in the Far East.

There were many challenges this year because of the Covid 19 pandemic and Rob, Steve and myself had long conversations and took advice for RBL County of Somerset officials and all agreed we were honour bound to try to do something meaningful on the poignant 75th anniversary. Our new chaplain and Rector the Revd. Alison Way was on a pre-arranged holiday and we were very fortunate that Penny Ashton, Reader at the Parish Church was able to step in. In spite of the weather, Penny was able to say prayers and David Shave from Wincanton Silver Band played Last Post and Reveille. I laid a wreath on behalf of Wincanton Royal British Legion, the Mayor Cllr. Susan Shelborn-Barrow laid the town wreath and District Cllr. Colin Winder the wreath on behalf of South Somerset District Council. Branch chairman Rob Dickinson said the traditional Exhortation before Last Post and The Kohima Blessing after Reveille.

On our relatively new War Memorial we chose the verse of the Kohima Blessing, which we should remember marks the suffering of all wars. *Tony*



The coming year 2021

2020 has been a challenging year but we feel we have still been able to uphold Remembrance, in many ways. 2021 could be very exciting, it is the 100th anniversary of the founding of the original British Legion and as such the 100th anniversary of Wincanton RBL as we were amongst the originals to be formed that year. Although we have no specifics yet of the commemorations rest assured that Wincanton RBL will be in the forefront of anything planned. When our long serving member John Keynes passed away he made a bequest for a cabinet to be made for the Parish Church to match the first cabinet. This has been done now and we as a branch wish to provide two new Remembrance books (one for each of the wars commemorated on the memorial in church). These will be bound and printed on special paper that should last a long time. A benefactor has provided funds for the cost. We are very grateful that the Revd. Alison Way has agreed to be our chaplain and we wish to present her with the Chaplain's Stole on the day of dedication of the new books. We are hoping that restrictions will be lifted next year and hope to include her formal acceptance of her role, the dedication of the books and cabinets and the 100 anniversary in a large church service, obviously this will depend on the outcome of the pandemic and us being legally allowed to have a "normal" church service. I will update everyone in the next Sandbag in November, covering our Remembrance commemoration. *Tony*